DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 435 PS 014 326

AUTHOR	Yin, Robert K.
TITLE	Federal Support for Research on the Family: An American Political Quandary. Draft.
INSTITUTION	Case Study Inst., Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Jun 80
CONTRACT	NIE-P-80-0066
NOTE	38p.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; *Family Life; Family Programs; Family Role; *Federal Government; *Financial Support; Public Agencies; *Public Policy; *Research Projects; *Research Utilization
IDENTIFIERS	National Institute of Education

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to indicate how the ambivalent posture of the government toward families has affected federal support of research on the family and studies of the family as educator. After an introductory section providing background information about American public policy, families, and education, the discussion centers on the fragmentation of support for family research. Specific topics discussed include patterns of support among federal agencies and diversity in support for research related to families and education. Subsequent discussion explores the uncertain path between knowledge and practice in terms of the federal emphasis on research utilization and the use of family research in education. The concluding section focuses on program priorities at the National Institute of Education. Current efforts of the Institute concerning families and education and the continuing dilemma for agencies attempting to support family research are discussed. Appended materials provide a partial list of family research supported by federal agencies and an organizational chart of federal interagency panels. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

NIE-P-80-0066

ED242435

DRAFT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been eproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH ON THE FAMILY: AN AMERICAN POLITICAL QUANDARY

Robert K. Yin

June 1980

PS 014326

THE CASE STUDY INSTITUTE
1327 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20036

PREFACE

This brief "case study" of the current status of support for family research was prepared for the National Institute of Education. NIE's Family and Community Studies Team is collaborating with the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (Department of Health and Human Services) to participate in a conference on "The Family and Education," sponsored by the Office of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Center for Educational Research and Innovation. A modified version of the present case study will be one of the papers presented at the conference.

The preparation of the case study benefited from the cooperation of numerous federal officials, involved in family research programs, who provided the latest materials on current issues. The author gratefully acknowledges this assistance, although none of the views expressed in the case study necessarily reflect either those of the officials contracted or those of NIE.

CONTENTS

PREFACE iii

Section
A. INTRODUCTION 1
Families and American Public Policy 1
Families and Education 3

B. FRAGMENTATION OF SUPPORT FOR FAMILY RESEARCH 6
Patterns of Support among Federal Agencies 6
Support for Research Related to Families and Education 13

C. THE UNCERTAIN PATH BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE 17
Federal Emphasis on Research Utilization 17
Utilization of Family Research in Education ... 18

D. PROGRAM PRIORITIES AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION 23
Current NIE Efforts on Families and Education .. 23
The Continuing Dilemma 26

Appendix
A. FAMILY RESEARCH SUPPORTED BY FEDERAL AGENCIES ... 29
B. ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE INTERAGENCY PANELS ... 31

REFERENCES 32

A. INTRODUCTION

Families and American Public Policy

Little doubt exists regarding the importance of the family in American society. National attention to the topic has been reflected most recently in the organization and conduct of the White House Conference on Families. The conference has involved a series of national, regional, and state conferences, and will culminate in an overall statement of objectives and plans to be pursued when the conference ends in 1981 (see White House Conference, 1980).

Papers already presented at conference workshops have called attention to the continued importance of the nuclear family (e.g., Sussman, 1980), the varied life-styles that have nevertheless emerged (e.g., Hareven, 1980), and the increasing problems of family life within contemporary American society. For instance, today's families must:

- Exist within a tax structure that is unfair to people choosing homemaking as a career;
- Survive social programs that tend to undermine the family unit; and
- Maintain adequate financial resources with employment policies that are not supportive of working parents.

In addition to these general ways through which existing public policies can affect family life, the conference also identified the critical relationship between families and schools (e.g.,

Watson, 1980). Improvements in educational status can clearly assist in the well-being of the family and also ease the burden of school personnel.

In spite of the emerging awareness of the connection between existing public policies and family life, an American "policy" toward the family has yet to be developed. Part of the problem is that national policymakers and their constituents are unwilling to encourage government to intervene in family affairs. Such affairs are still viewed in America as a basically private matter, to be separated from government in almost the same manner as the separation between church and state. In general, although federal intervention has been accepted for institutions in the *public sector* and in the *private industry sector*, there is still hesitation to intervene in what might be called the *community sector*.* Even the White House Conference on Families has engendered unusual controversy (Dewar, 1980; and Rich, 1980), and previous attempts at passing legislation to provide a broad range of services to American families have met with strong public opposition (e.g., see Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 1974).

There are many ways of arguing for and against this view of the relationship between government and the family. On the one hand, some people can point to existing federal programs--e.g., the AFDC payments program--as having a serious impact on

*For a discussion of the problems of federal support for community sector activities, see Yin, forthcoming.

the family; such people will conclude that government *already* intervenes in family affairs, and that the failure to recognize this fact has led to undesirable social consequences. On the other hand, it can be argued that most of the interventions are primarily concerned with other objectives--e.g., reducing poverty--and that a "family program" is neither intended nor desired. As a result of these alternative arguments, there is continued ambivalence on the subject of whether any new federal policies should explicitly incorporate the needs of the American family.

Families and Education

Nowhere has this ambivalence in policy formulation been as evident as in dealing with families and education, a subtopic of special concern to the present paper. The role of the family in educating the child in unquestioned. As an infant, child, or youth, an individual receives a wide variety of "instruction" from family members, including:

- Curriculum-specific information, such as how to read or do arithmetic;
- Education-related information, such as one's attitudes toward schooling;
- Guidance for coping with daily activities, consumer roles, and other common problems; and
- General attitudes and norms in dealing with other individuals and community members.

"Instruction" can also emanate from the family environment, and not merely the individual members of the family. In this

sense, television, other products found in the home, and family activities may all be considered part of the family's influence on an individual's education.

Often times, family instruction facilitates school instruction. In other cases, the two compete with each other. Although the role of family as educator can be easily documented, the family has only been a marginal concern in American education policy. Major federal initiatives in education, taken to insure that every American child has an equal opportunity for high-quality education, have instead been dominated by efforts to improve formal educational institutions--i.e., the school. School services are supplemented through ESEA Title I and other aid-to-education programs; *innovative school practices* are encouraged through federal demonstration and dissemination programs; and *educational research* is underwritten by such agencies as the National Institute of Education.

Parental involvement in school affairs is mandated in a few areas--e.g., Title I Parent Advisory Councils--but these initiatives have still been taken with the primary motive of assisting schools and have not necessarily addressed the broader role of parents as educators. Other exceptions to this general observation have to do with the education of special population groups. In the case of the handicapped, for instance, there do exist federal programs to counsel and train parents as educators. ESEA Title II also encourages programs to support families in teaching basic skills to their children; however, the programs

are limited in their goals and only represent a small investment in federal funds (less than $100 million).

Overall, federal education policy has not viewed education as the outcome of school *and family* efforts. Instead, current policies only emphasize the role of the school and tend to ignore the potential contributions of the family. The stance taken is fully reflective of the broader ambivalence regarding the government and family relationship, for any recognition of the importance of the family's role in education could potentially lead to suggestions for federal intervention in family affairs.

The purpose of this paper is not to settle (or even to articulate further) the debate on government and the family. The main objective is to indicate how the ambivalent posture has affected federal support of *research* on the family, and especially support for studies of the family as educator. A general conclusion is that such research support:

- Is highly fragmented among various federal agencies and sub-agencies;
- Follows an uncertain path in linking knowledge to practice; and
- Causes special dilemmas for agencies such as the National Institute of Education, whose mission is to support research on education.

B. FRAGMENTATION OF SUPPORT FOR FAMILY RESEARCH

Patterns of Support among Federal Agencies

Research on the family is currently supported by a wide range of federal agencies. Most of the agencies have national missions that are either related to a sector of the economy (e.g., agriculture, labor, commerce) or to a general problem area (e.g., health, mental health, poverty, justice). A social unit such as the family does not fall neatly into either the sectoral or problem-oriented structure, and as a result family research can be and has been sponsored by a large number of agencies.

In theory, the Administration of Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF)--and in particular its newly formed Office on Families--serves as a "coordinating point for all federal programs for children and their families" (Abramson, 1978), but in practice the diverse federal efforts have been undertaken with little collaborative overview.* Moreover, the ACYF interest in family research emanates from a focus on the child; there are numerous other family issues (e.g., work, marriage, home economics, and physical or psychological maladjustments) that do not necessarily involve children and that are dominated by federal agencies besides ACYF.

*For annual listings of ACYF's research awards, see Grotberg et al. (1980) as the latest example. This listing suggests that only a minor proportion of the research is devoted to families.

A recent survey of federally sponsored research on the family revealed that nine major departments and independent agencies were providing support in 1976 (Wakefield, 1979):

- Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
- Department of Agriculture
- Veterans Administration
- National Science Foundation
- Department of Labor
- Department of Justice
- Department of Defense
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- National Endowment for the Humanities

The creation of the Department of Education adds at least a tenth agency to the list, and the survey failed to cover the research supported by an eleventh agency, the Department of Commerce (Bureau of the Census). Moreover, the list does not begin to appreciate the numerous units of government involved at the sub-agency level. Within the newly named Department of Health and Human Services, for instance, may be found at least ten relevant components that may sponsor some aspect of research on the family:

- Office of Human Development Services
  - Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (incorporates the former Office of Child Development as well as other programs)
  - Administration for Public Services

- Administration on Developmental Disabilities
- Administration on Aging

- Health Services Administration
  - Bureau of Community Health Services (Maternal and Child Health Services)

- Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration
  - National Institute of Mental Health
  - National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
  - National Institute on Drug Abuse

- National Institutes of Health
  - National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
  - National Institute on Aging

The fragmentation of research support among the various federal sub-agencies, both within and outside of the Department of Health and Human Services, makes it extremely difficult to determine the current extent of support for family research. Arbitrary definitions of "research," "family-relatedness," and other key concepts need to be set, and candidate projects must be screened individually for inclusion or exclusion.* Such an effort was attempted in the above-mentioned survey (Wakefield, 1979), but no definitive dollar figures were calculable. The survey merely presented the level of support for a sub-agency's entire research program, and made no attempt to determine the portion devoted to family research.

---

*Wakefield (1979) contains summaries of individual projects on family research, supported by the federal government in FY 1976.

An alternative way of summarizing current patterns of federal support is to examine the distribution of research *projects* rather than dollars. Of course, because many research projects are multiple-year efforts, tabulations of project summaries cannot yield precise estimates of annual federal activity. Nevertheless, Table 1 shows the major agencies supporting family research projects, based on an examination by Wakefield (1979) of projects active in 1976. The table suggests that about 400 projects were directly related to family issues ("family system" research) and that an additional 700 projects were family related. A similar effort was undertaken by a George Washington University group (see Hertz, 1978), but the only family research covered was that related to childhood issues. The effort identified 690 such family-related projects being supported in FY 1977.* (Appendix A indicates the distribution of these projects by federal sub-agency.)

In spite of the inability to define precisely the distribution of support, some general observations may be made about the effects of this fragmentation. First, a given research project on family processes may be supported by almost all of the potentially relevant sub-agencies. The determination of the most relevant sub-agency will depend upon the orientation of the project, but not necessarily the project's basic academic setting or data collection method. Some agencies do tend

*For comparison, Hill (1980) estimates that there are about 2,200 publications on the family annually. However, these may represent more than single projects and definitely include non-federally-funded research.

Table 1

FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECTS, FY 1976,
BY FEDERAL SUPPORT AGENCY

Federal Agency	Family System Projects	Family-Related Projects	Total
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare			
Administration on Child, Youth, and Families	39	110	149
National Institute of Mental Health	135	157	292
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development	50	38	88
National Institute of Education	16	29	45
Office of Education	---	194	194
Other	26	72	98
Department of Labor	14	10	24
National Science Foundation	23	7	30
Veterans Administration	24	10	34
Department of Agriculture	74	47	121
Miscellaneous	18	18	36
Total	419	692	1,111

SOURCE: Wakefield Washington Associates, *Family Research* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979).

to support more "basic" research, whereas other agencies will only support research on a particular target population or social problem. Nevertheless, it is probably true that the same essential research project can be modified to be eligible for support from almost any of the sub-agencies.

Second, there appear to be few distinctions regarding the type of research or the academic discipline being supported from sub-agency to sub-agency. Typically, most sub-agencies support research involving the following social science strategies:

- Interviews of family members and related individuals;
- Analysis of large-scale survey data, usually involving national samples of households or individuals;
- Analysis of agency records (e.g., school or social service records) regarding family and individual characteristics.

Thus, most agencies support work done by psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, and economists. The health agencies tend to support clinical and experimental research in addition to the above, and several agencies also support demonstration projects in which specific services are provided to families. In contrast, few of the projects, regardless of agency, involve case studies of families.*

*An initial intention of the present paper was to display and summarize project abstracts in relation to these methodological characteristics. However, perusals of existing abstracts

Third, the degree to which family factors are the primary versus secondary theme of the research will vary from sub-agency to sub-agency. For only a few agencies--e.g., the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)--is the family the primary theme. Thus, NIMH is more likely to support studies in which family conditions are *dependent* variables. For most of the other agencies, the family is likely to be a secondary theme. Thus, family conditions will frequently be one of several sets of *independent* variables, with the dependent variables more directly related to the mission of the agency. However, this general distinction between primary and secondary themes should not be overdrawn; the sub-agencies all support a diverse arrary of family research.

Fourth and most important, the fragmentation makes it extremely difficult to synthesize individual research efforts, and to discriminate potential breakthroughs from trivial findings. Individual studies do get reviewed and synthesized in the traditional academic sense--i.e., via journal publication and academic networking--but the opportunity to complement the academic marketplace with agency-sponsored synthesis efforts is lost. Such agency-sponsored efforts (e.g., commissioned reviews of research, policy-oriented conferences, and agenda-setting workshops) have the unique ability to facilitate

---

(Wakefield, 1979) indicated no consistent patterns of differences or similarities that were worth highlighting.

interdisciplinary communication, which is greatly needed in family research but which tends to be ignored by the academic marketplace.

All of these observations are not intended to suggest that family research would benefit if all such research were sponsored by a single agency or two. In fact, various expert panels have suggested that research often suffers under such an autocratic arrangement, because of the resulting narrowness of interests (e.g., Task Force, 1976, p. 21). The main point is that the current patterns of support for family research may err in the opposite direction. When too many sub-agencies are involved, each with its own mission-orientation, some undesirable loss of efficiency may result, and investigators and policymakers may unknowingly rediscover the lessons of others or fail to benefit from others' insights.

Support for Research Related to Families and Education

The pattern of diversity and its effects can also be illustrated with the topic of immediate concern to this paper, families and education. Suppose, for example, that research is to be done on: *the role of the family in improving an individual's reading ability* (for a review of this research, see Hess and Holloway, 1979). The following different kinds of projects could be supported by different kinds of sub-agencies:

- Research on *family communication patterns*, forming a key part of the behavioral processes underlying the teaching of reading in the home, might be supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development or by the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families.

- Research on the particular *teaching and learning skills* for reading, exploring the operational lessons for intra-family behavior, might be supported by the National Institute of Education.

- Research that focuses on specific *target populations* of problem children or problem families, potentially requiring modifications of any operational lessons, might be supported by:
  - the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (for handicapped children);
  - the National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Department of Justice (for delinquent youths);
  - the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (for problems of foster parents);
  - the Navy Family Program Office, Department of the Navy (for problems of military families).

- Research that focuses on specific *reading materials* that might be used by the family related to such social problems as substance abuse, might be supported by the National Institute of Drug Abuse.

This list could be expanded further, and the pattern of support is clearly justified by the existing mandates of the relevant sub-agencies. A major problem, however, is that the potential research findings might not predictably fall into such neat categories. For example, a study done for the Navy Department might very well uncover important lessons in relation to the research being supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Similarly, the data base for the study supported by the Navy Department might

provide an important contribution to the population and household studies supported by the Bureau of the Census. Again, because good research is accompanied by academic publication, many of the theoretical issues and empirical results will be sorted through the academic marketplace; however, the potential policy lessons across the various agencies may have no similar outlet.

To compensate in part for the fragmented support for this type of research, the various federal agencies have developed and maintained interagency committees that share relevant information. Of particular interest are two such committees, the Interagency Panel for R&D on Adolescence, and the Interagency Panel on Early Childhood R&D. Both panels involve representatives from a variety of agencies (see Appendix B for a simplified organization chart), and both have attempted to classify and retrieve information on relevant research projects. However, neither panel focuses exclusively on the family (for an exception, see Hill, 1980), and a coordinating committee for family affairs (which should include issues far beyond those of childhood or adolescence) might be considered in the future.

In summary, the current pattern of support for research reflects an overly fragmented state. One hunch is that the fragmentation is the direct result of the ambiguity in federal policy toward family affairs. Because government policy is uncertain, research support fails to have any central thrust;

research is sponsored under a variety of objectives, each of which is central to some other federal mission but only indirectly related to the family.

C. THE UNCERTAIN PATH BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

Federal Emphasis on Research Utilization

Federal support of research has increasingly reflected the concomitant goal of improving policy or practice. Although most of the basic research supported by the National Institutes of Health or by the National Science Foundation is still justified in terms of improving knowledge as the major payoff, agencies that support social research have been under mounting pressure to create explicit links between research results and improvements in practice.

This general pressure may be noted with particular attention to agencies supporting family research. One component of ACYF, for instance, has the following statement in its application forms for the Child Welfare Research and Demonstration Grants Program:

> The Children's Bureau, in funding a research or demonstration project, makes the assumption that the activity funded will produce information that has *immediate value for application in the field* and that this information should therefore be disseminated and utilized. [Emphasis added.]

In short, every project is to produce usable information and to have a dissemination or utilization plan. In education, to take another example, the National Institute of Education (NIE) was founded to support "scientific inquiry into educational processes," and the original organization of the Institute was

heavily oriented toward various research topics. However, NIE has gradually shifted toward supporting research that is presumed to have a more direct bearing on practical applications (see Getzels, 1978).

The general emphasis on research utilization may be a justifiable theme for federal research policy (although no endorsement of the preceding two illustrations is necessarily intended). Agencies may want to continue to improve their utilization strategies, but the expectation that every research project will have a practical payoff reveals a fundamental misunderstanding about the research enterprise (e.g., see Yin, 1976). Effective utilization strategies are difficult to develop, should not be construed narrowly and hence be limited on direct effects on policy or practice, and are not the topic of the present paper. Nevertheless, the general emphasis on research utilization has called attention to a second major characteristic of family research: For family research, the link between research and policy or practice is weak, partly again because of the lack of a governmental policy toward families.

Utilization of Family Research in Education

The lack of consensus over the role of government in intervening in family affairs means that federal agencies have no broad programs for putting family research to use. This difficulty may again be illustrated with the topic of families as educators.

Where special populations are the target of concern, the policy relevance of family research has been easy to establish. A review of research on parenting skills, for instance, focusing on the needs of low-income families, indicated two dominant themes (Lazar and Chapman, no date):

> Almost without exception, parent education means mother education.
>
> [and later]
>
> Virtually all the studies which have focused on training mothers as the primary agents of intervention have reported positive immediate effects on the IQ, achievement, or language development of the children.

Not surprisingly, a wide variety of relevant research can be cited wherever a federal program, such as Head Start, has existed as the practical outlet for the results of the research (for a review, see Mann et al., 1978).

In contrast, a recent paper by Keasey (1979) provides an excellent summary of existing research on middle-class parents' roles in increasing a child's motivation to do well in school. The paper gives thirteen propositions, indicating the degree of support for these propositions on the part of various studies. The paper concludes that the findings are consistent and robust enough to develop guidelines for training or advising parents. However, the paper notes that much of this training will require repetitive exposure and some resources external to the family.

The general problem addressed by Keasey's paper certainly falls within the overall mandate of the Department of Education. If family behavior can be improved in the direction of increasing a child's motivation to learn and achieve in school, any change could possibly improve educational outcomes and reduce the current burdens of school personnel. Yet, to establish a federal program to carry out such parent training, if focused on the needs of the average American family, would challenge directly the current ambivalence in federal policy and the American family. Much debate would occur, regarding the desirability of government interference in parenting roles. The only exception might be if Keasey's paper were directed at the needs of a special population--e.g., parents of handicapped children. In such a special case (which is *not* the topic of Keasey's paper), parent education on their child's needs and the provision of family counseling are an established part of the programs of the Bureau of the Education of the Handicapped.

In short, research information that pertains to the mainstream problems of the general population does not have an immediate practical outlet, not necessarily because of the failure of research but because of the infrequency of relevant public programs. Judged by this narrow view of research utilization, family research therefore often appears overly academic and irrelevant. This appearance may be deceiving, because a recent review of trends in family research from 1962 to 1976 has suggested an increase in the proportion of applied research (see Table 2). Thus, although the inference about

Table 2

TYPES OF FAMILY RESEARCH IN PUBLISHED ARTICLES, 1962-76

Type of Research	Multi-Year Interval			
	1962-65 %	1966-68 %	1969-72 %	1973-76 %
Empirical only	49.2	58.9	23.6	19.2
Theoretical only	4.8	5.9	6.7	7.2
Theoretical-Empirical	17.2	13.3	26.2	28.0
Methodological	1.2	3.3	4.8	4.9
Discussion	20.6	15.9	18.4	10.9
Applied-Professional oriented	4.5	1.8	14.5	25.3
Other	2.4	1.5	5.8	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCE: Adapted from Ruben Hill, "Status of Research on the Family, 1979," paper presented for Interagency Panel on Early Childhood R&D and Interagency Panel for R&D on Adolescence, Washington, D.C., May 1980.

the lack of relevance may be unfair, it produces tenuous arguments for federal support of family research in the first place. If public programs do not stand to benefit, even in the long run, from family research, what are the other justifications for federal support of such research?

The traditional answer would be that such research adds to society's overall knowledge about the family, and that family research should be supported in the same spirit as other basic research. In the long run, such research can have enormous impact on practice. For example, Getzels (1978) argues that basic research in education has affected attitudes

toward pupils, leadership style among school personnel, classroom management, and the nature of the curriculum, although much of this impact has not been fully appreciated. However, this traditional answer has become less satisfactory because of the emphasis on research utilization. A second answer, also more acceptable in an earlier era, is that the research can benefit private institutions offering services to parents, or can be communicated to parents directly, to be put to whatever use they see fit. This type of research utilization has also received declining attention, however, and is not considered sufficient as the only justification for research support.

In summary, support for family research again suffers indirectly because of the lack of governmental policy in dealing with family affairs. Thus, in addition to the observed fragmentation of support shown earlier, this section has suggested that the justification for supporting such research is difficult because of the current emphasis on research utilization. Research findings have few potential outlets in terms of affecting policy or practice, because public programs dealing with family affairs do not exist in great abundance. Both of these conditions cause special dilemmas for agencies such as the National Institute of Education (NIE), whose main objective is to support research that will improve educational quality and equity, and the paper now turns to these dilemmas.

D. PROGRAM PRIORITIES AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

Current NIE Efforts on Families and Education

Within NIE, family-related research is not one of NIE's major existing programs. Instead, two cross-cutting "teams" have been organized, the Family and Community Studies Team and the Home and Community Study Team.* Each team is responsible for developing a coherent plan for supporting family research in the future, although the latter team has also initiated several research awards on the topic, totaling about $1 million.

When the two teams were first established, a basic division of responsibility was to have the first team focus on *policy-application* issues and the second team focus on *behavioral and social processes*. Thus, for example, the Family and Community Studies Team has tried to understand the ways in which new policies can be implemented--e.g., by using community organizations, parent-teacher associations, or other institutional systems. In contrast, the Home and Community Study Team initially focused on the learning processes that occur in the home, either as a result of parental behavior or of the home environment--e.g., television programs.

*The latter has also been called the "Families as Educators Team."

However, neither team has received widespread support within NIE. First, because federal educational policy is dominated by a concern for improving the school, advances in home learning are viewed as potentially competing with the focus of the school as an institution. Part of this competitive spirit is a remnant of earlier conflicts in the United States in the 1960s, between community and school; community control of schools was of interest at that time because of a presumed inadequacy of the school environment. Though this conflict has largely subsided as a politically sensitive issue, the more complementary view of home and school learning--in which both contribute in a "co-productive way" to a child's education--has still not become prevalent.

Second, due to the lack of federal programs aimed at improving family affairs, neither team has been able to develop a strong rationale regarding the potential usefulness of the research it would like to support. Among federal priorities, family and education continues to be interpreted as lacking policy relevance. And, as noted previously, the broader emphasis on research utilization has undermined any arguments for supporting such research on the traditional grounds of adding to society's general knowledge.

Most recently, the second of the teams, the Home and Community Study Team, has attempted to deal with these problems by initiating a new focus on home-school relationships (see Moles et al., 1980). Such a focus would encourage research

on the communication and coordination between teachers and parents regarding a child's learning. At an interpersonal level, the research could cover the intensity of contact, the ways of reducing conflicts, and the development of closer working relationships between family and school members. In theory, this newer focus on home-school relationships would allow NIE to work within its overall priority toward improving schools and provide a response to the research utilization issue.

However, this shift may also have created new problems. First, the shift begins to blur the initial distinction between the responsibilities of the two teams. Some adjustment will probably have to be made because the topic of home-school relationships involves issues of policy application and behavioral processes simultaneously. Second, and more important to the overall pattern of federal support for family research, the topic of home-school relationships overlaps directly with a previous research priority of ACYF. In its program statement for fiscal year *1974*, one of ACYF's predecessor agencies, the Office of Child Development, described two major priority issues. The second issue was described as follows:

> How families do/do not interface with the school in socializing the child.
>
> - How does the school, as a socialization agent, enhance or conflict with the socialization patterns and educational expectations characteristic of different family types and cultural groups? How does each communicate its expectations to the other and how can congruence be achieved?

- What discontinuities in, or barriers to, the interface between the family and school are associated with specific ecological factors such as bilingual culture? What role do the family, school, and other institutions play in creating and maintaining such barriers? How do these barriers influence children's social and psychological identity and what effect does a discontinuity between the culture of the school and that of the home have on families' efforts to break the cycle of poverty?

A distinction between the ACYF and NIE missions can disentangle this apparent overlap. In the ACYF case, any of the funded research was presumably oriented toward family conditions as they might have been affected by the school (Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, 1974), whereas in the NIE case, any of the new research will presumably be oriented toward school conditions as they might be affected by the family. In reality, however, this type of distinction, as previously suggested, can easily become blurred.

The Continuing Dilemma

This rendition of current priorities within NIE should indicate the continuing dilemma for agencies attempting to support family research. First, because of the fragmentation of support for family research, almost any new thrust for one sub-agency will probably overlap directly with some previous (or current) thrust of other sub-agencies. Second, because of the emphasis on research utilization, research will continue to be viewed as being of lower priority for those topics--e.g.,

families--in which government intervention policies have not been intensively developed. Both conditions make the support of family research difficult as part of the standard resource allocation exercise within any given agency. In short, budgets for family research will be difficult to defend, especially where a federal agency is perceived as having an applied rather than basic research mission.

The general point of the present case study is that these conditions may exist independent of the nature or quality of the actual research. In fact, the reviews of family research cited in the preceding sections have all revealed a relatively sound and consistent body of knowledge. Numerous gaps in knowledge remain, and many of the issues need to be articulated in greater depth; for policy direction in education, however, the general lesson appears to be clear: Families have been shown to be an essential co-producer of a desired policy outcome (improved education), and the specific ways in which families facilitate the educational process have also been identified (e.g., Lazar and Chapman, no date; Watson, 1980; Keasey, 1979; and Hess and Holloway, 1979).

Until the relationship between government and families is clarified further, support for family research will continue to encounter the above difficulties. Where the traditional justification of research--i.e., on grounds of adding to society's general knowledge--is no longer adequate, and where no clear policy alternatives exist, federal support for research

has become increasingly difficult to justify. For family research, precisely this situation has arisen. Only changes in political priorities, leading for example to a change in the intervention position of the government, can alter the state of affairs. Until then, research-supporting agencies and research investigators can only play a temporizing role.

Appendix A

FAMILY RESEARCH SUPPORTED BY FEDERAL AGENCIES
(Partial List*)

Agency/Sub-agency	Number of Projects Active in FY 1977**	Main Categories of Family Research Supported
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare		
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE)	5	Family/society interface Child care arrangements Impact of family on education
Office of Human Development Services		
Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF)	128	Parental roles/behavior Family/society interface Parent-child relationships Family structure
Administration for Public Services	10	Family/society interface Family health
Rehabilitation Services Administration	4	Parental roles/behavior
Bureau of Community Health Services	23	Parent-child relationships Parental roles/behavior
Health Care Financing Administration	2	
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)	80	Parent-child relationships Family health
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)	166	Parent-child relationships Family health Parental roles/behavior Family structure

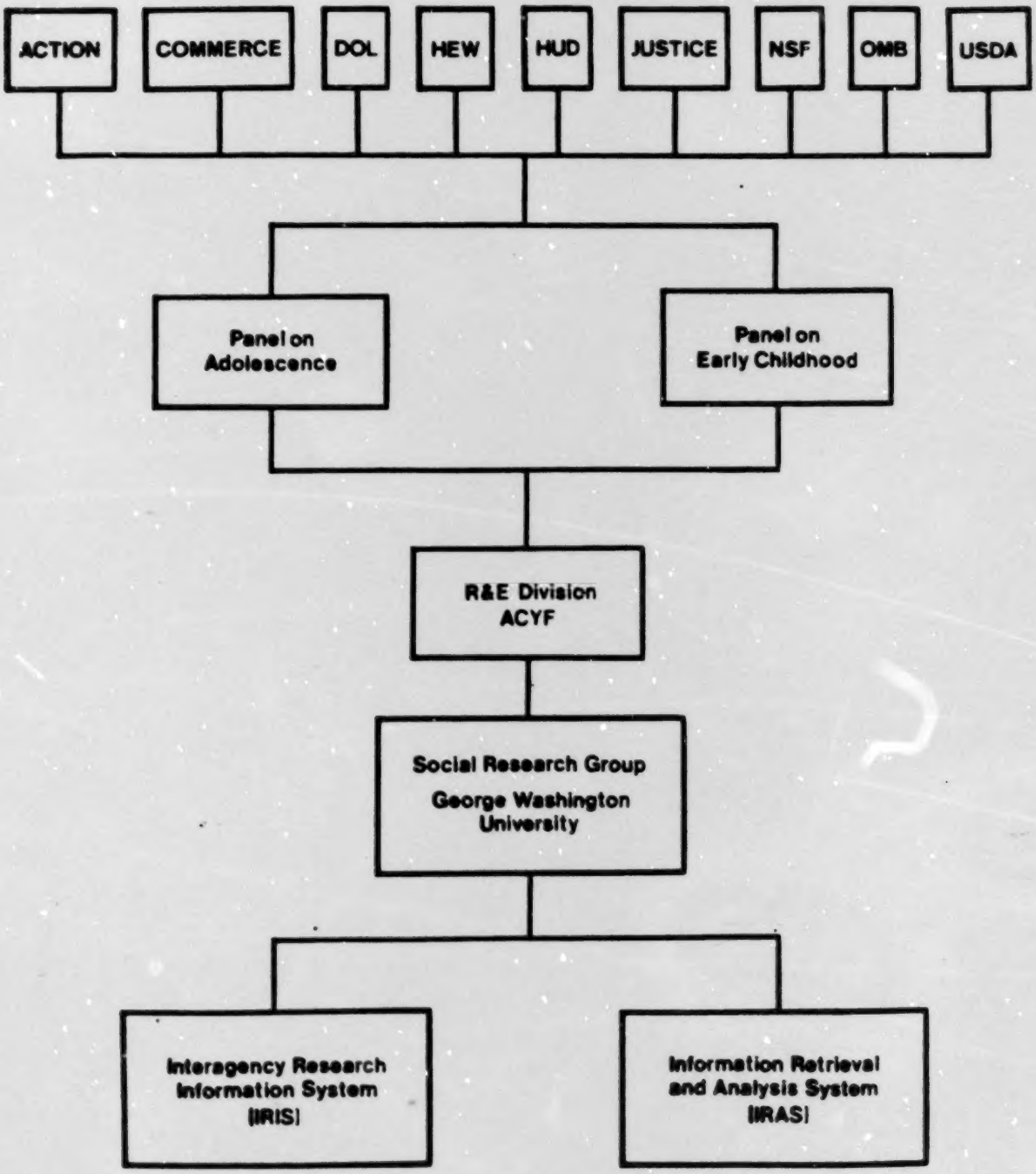
Agency/Sub-agency	Number of Projects Active in FY 1977	Main Categories of Family Research Supported
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (continued)		
National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke	9	Family health
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)	10	Family health
National Institute on Drug Abuse	12	Parent-child relationships Family health
National Institute of Education	18	Family structure Family/society interface Impact of family on education
Office of Education		
Bureau of Education for the Handicapped	127	Parent-child relationships Parental roles/behavior Family health
Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education	7	Parental roles/behavior
Office of Career Education	4	
Office of Indian Education	20	Family structure
Office of Planning, Budget, and Evaluation	4	
Department of Agriculture	47	Family/society interface Parental roles/behavior
National Science Foundation	11	Parent-child relationships Parental roles/behavior
TOTAL FOR ALL AGENCIES	687	

*This tabulation is based on data in Hertz, 1978. The projects only cover studies related to early childhood. The data do not include all family research projects and do not include research supported by agencies such as the Administration on Aging, Bureau of the Census, or Veterans Administration.

**Projects may have been funded in FY 1977 or earlier.

Appendix B

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE INTERAGENCY PANELS



REFERENCES

Abramson, Mark A., *Funding of Social Knowledge Production and Application: A Survey of Federal Agencies* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1978).

Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, "Program Guidance for Research and Demonstration Activities in the Area of Child and Family Development," Washington, D.C., June 1979.

Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Joint Hearings* (covering the proposed Child and Family Services Act, 1974), U.S. Senate, 93d Congress, 2d Session, August 1974.

Dewar, Helen, "Conference on the Family is Rallying 'New Right' Activists," *The Washington Post*, January 18, 1980, p. A2.

Getzels, J.W., "Paradigm and Practice: On the Impact of Basic Research in Education," in Patrick Suppes (ed.), *Impact of Research on Education* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Education, 1978), pp. 477-521.

Grotberg, Edith H., et al., *Research, Demonstration, and Evaluation Studies, FY 1979* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980, DHEW Publication No. (OHDS) 80-30030).

Hareven, Tamara K., "American Families in Transition," paper prepared for National Research Forum on Family Issues, White House Conference on Families, Washington, D.C., April 1980.

Hertz, Thomas W., *Toward Interagency Coordination: FY '77 Federal Research and Development on Early Childhood*, Social Research Group, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., May 1978.

Hess, Robert D., and Susan Holloway, "The Intergenerational Transmission of Literacy," unpublished paper, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., June 1979.

Hill, Reuben, "Status of Research on the Family, 1979," paper presented for Interagency Panel on Early Childhood R&D and Interagency Panel for R&D on Adolescence, Washington, D.C., May 1980.